

Vital Records Online Study Committee

Report of Findings

December 2002

**Committee Appointed by the Secretary
Department of Health and Family Services**

Foreword

Part of 2001 Wisconsin Act 16 directed the Secretary of the Department of Health and Family Services to appoint a committee to develop guidelines for an online, electronic filing system for Wisconsin vital records. Vital records include certificates of birth, death, marriage and divorce.

Act 16 also required the committee to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature by January 1, 2003. This report was prepared to fulfill that requirement.

The report was prepared by the Vital Records Online Study Committee, whose members were appointed by Secretary Phyllis Dubé. Act 16 specified that the committee should include the State Registrar, three Local Registrars, three Department representatives, and a genealogist. The Secretary also appointed representatives of other vital records filing parties and data users to the committee. See Appendix F for a list of all committee members.

For more information on the contents of this report, please send inquiries to:

Peggy Peterson
Assistant State Registrar
Wisconsin Vital Records Office
Department of Health and Family Services
P.O. Box 309, Madison WI 53701-0309
Telephone: (608) 267-7812
E-mail: peterpL@dhfs.state.wi.us

Vital Records Online Study Committee: Report of Findings

Executive Summary

Committee Formation and Study Methods

2001 Wisconsin Act 16 directed the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) to form a committee to recommend guidelines for a state vital records online electronic filing system. The committee report must include system recommendations that incorporate privacy, flexibility, productivity, and state-tested identity-theft prevention features. The committee report must also recommend increases, if necessary, in vital records fees for system implementation and recommend allocation of revenues resulting from the fee increases. In appointing committee members, Secretary Dubé followed the Act's specifications and also expanded the committee to include vital records business stakeholders not mentioned in the legislation.

Since January 2002, the committee has met 12 times. Under its guidance, DHFS staff conducted an online survey of Wisconsin vital records business partners (Local Registrars, county clerks, clerks of court, coroners, medical examiners, funeral directors and hospitals) to ascertain their current readiness for electronic business and their business needs related to vital records processing. Staff surveyed seven states that have electronic vital records registration systems to obtain information about system costs and security methods. The committee attended vendor demonstrations of vital records registration products currently used in other states.

Background

The Wisconsin Vital Records Program is a state and local cooperative system composed of the State Vital Records Office (in DHFS), 74 Local Registrars, and assorted business partners. This system registers and maintains records of all Wisconsin births (approximately 68,000 annually), deaths (approximately 46,000 annually), marriages (approximately 36,000 annually), and divorces (approximately 18,000 annually).

State and local vital records offices must provide accurate and expeditious proof of vital events to secure basic rights and benefits such as employment, child support, inheritance, insurance coverage, family research and foreign travel. Vital records are used to support authorization or discontinuation of entitlement payments and to assist in fraud detection and prosecution. Vital records data are essential to supplement Census data, administer health programs, and monitor outbreaks of communicable diseases and sentinel events related to bioterrorism.

The current statewide vital records system is paper-intensive, requiring business partners to maintain outdated business practices, including redundant data entry. To a large extent it depends on the U.S. mail or hand-delivery of typed or printed documents. The system does not address critical public health needs for real-time reporting of public health emergencies, including deaths from bioterrorism.

A statewide electronic filing system for vital records will allow vital records business partners to incorporate existing technology currently used to expedite other office processes, eliminate redundant activities and improve the quality and timeliness of all vital records functions. Fees collected will allow the state and other local vital records offices to purchase hardware needed to increase the efficiency of their operations and improve services to the public. Finally, the online system will allow real-time reporting of sentinel events that are critical to the development of disease and injury prevention programs and especially to the bioterrorism surveillance initiative.

Summary Recommendation

The committee recommends that the Wisconsin Vital Records Program be directed to develop and implement an electronic vital records filing system for Wisconsin as specified in the guidelines contained in the committee report of findings, supported by the recommended statute changes and funded by recommended fee allocations. The cost of automation is low relative to the benefits that will be realized by the public and by government programs that depend on the efficiency of the vital records program in their daily operations.

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Vital Records Online Study Committee Report of Findings

Chapter I: Introduction

A. Impact of the Wisconsin Vital Records Program

The Wisconsin Vital Records Program provides critical services to the citizens of this state and the nation and affects people at the most critical times in their lives: a birth of a child, a death of a family member, a marriage or a divorce. Local and state vital records offices are routinely called upon to expedite record requests for a frantic traveler stranded without necessary identification, for a family needing proof of marriage to adopt a child, for a young couple requiring proof of paternity to obtain insurance for a critically ill newborn, for a family needing copies of a death certificate to obtain emergency financial assistance, for a Social Security official investigating a case of fraud, or for a public health officer checking on the status of death reports related to an epidemic.

The public depends on the vital records program to be responsive to its needs, especially in times of personal emergency. In serving the public, the vital records system also serves the needs of a variety of businesses and government agencies. Employers, insurance companies, financial institutions, the armed forces, driver's license agencies, passport offices, child support enforcement agencies, public assistance programs, and other government programs, including Social Security, depend on vital records to provide reliable, verifiable proof of the facts of a vital event.

The state and local public health agencies responsible for promoting the health and well-being of Wisconsin citizens have identified timely access to vital records data as essential in meeting those goals. The core functions of state and local public health, as required by statute, depend on the timely reporting of outbreaks of diseases (e.g., foodborne diseases, HIV, Hepatitis C), new and emerging health issues (e.g., new variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease), environmental health hazards (e.g., heat-related deaths), and threats of bioterrorism. Unfortunately, under the current method for filing vital records, it takes weeks for much of this crucial information to become available to public health agencies.

Demographic data collected from vital records provide federal, state and local government agencies with essential information for use in population-based planning during non-Census years. Historians and genealogists use vital records to reconstruct the history of the state and its people.

Vital records play a pivotal role in fraud prevention. Law enforcement, the business community, government entitlement programs and individuals all depend upon the efficiency, accuracy, and integrity of the state's vital records program to assist them in identifying and reducing identify theft, fraud and inappropriate disbursement of funds or benefits.

B. Problem Summary

The Wisconsin Vital Records Program is a state and local cooperative system, composed of the State Vital Records Office (part of the Department of Health and Family Services), Local Registrars (county registers of deeds and the Milwaukee and West Allis health offices) and assorted business partners. Under the direction of the State Registrar, the vital records system registers and maintains records of all Wisconsin births, deaths, marriages, and divorces, and collects fetal death data and Wisconsin resident birth and death abstracts from other states, as required by State Statute. The 74 Local Registrars in Wisconsin file and maintain vital records for events that occur in their jurisdictions or to residents of their jurisdictions and send those records to the State Vital Records Office; they also issue copies of vital records needed by the public, employers, private companies, and government agencies to verify identity or prove that a vital event occurred. Vital records must be filed in a timely manner so that copies and information can be issued as soon as possible. By having 75 vital records offices in Wisconsin, the State Vital Records Program is able to provide the best service possible to the public and other government agencies, within the limitations of a paper-intensive system.

Vital records offices in Wisconsin file approximately 68,000 birth records, 46,000 death records, 36,000 marriage records, and 18,000 divorce records each year. The statewide system used to register and amend vital records is paper-intensive and only partially automated. The transmission of information between filing parties, Local Registrars, and the State Registrar does not incorporate advances in technology that would make communication more timely, secure, and efficient. Currently, two-thirds of the records filed annually are submitted on paper. This requires Local Registrars and other vital records business partners, including birthing facilities, funeral directors, physicians, coroners and medical examiners, county clerks, and county clerks of court, to fill out or amend vital records forms on typewriters before mailing these documents to the State Office. The speed of registration of legal documents and data is dependent upon the U.S. postal service or, in some cases, long-distance travel for hand-delivery, in order to meet statutory filing deadlines. The State Vital Records Office has developed several stand-alone computer applications to make in-house record processing more effective. However, these systems are not readily available to Local Registrars, are difficult to modify, have limited ability to communicate with each other, use outdated technology, and are not flexible enough to meet current needs of the State and Local Registrars and the filing parties. Some Local Registrars have automated their vital records functions but the majority are still using manual systems. Many registrars have little or no room for expanding their vital records files and are seeking an acceptable alternative to filing paper records.

The process used to index and amend vital records has varied over the years, resulting in a current system of multiple index and record formats. Approximately 10 million birth, death, marriage and divorce records and indexes are housed in the State Vital Records Office. These records and indexes must be edited for correctness and protected against damage or destruction.

While the Legislature took steps in 2001 Act 16 (Appendix A) to close loopholes that allowed uncontrolled access to vital records and vital records indexes, concern about identity theft persists. Increased concerns over privacy and the misuse of vital records in identity theft crimes have prompted state and local registration offices to spend more resources protecting vital records from unauthorized access, leaving less time to devote to a paper-intensive system. To provide the level of service that employers, the public, child support enforcement and other agencies require, while safeguarding the privacy rights of individuals whose events are recorded and recognizing the rights of historians and public researchers, it is necessary to improve and expand the current level of automation used by the statewide vital records system. An automated system will also enhance efforts to preserve vital records for the future.

The present state and local cooperative vital records system provides an invaluable service to the citizens of this state. To strengthen and maximize that partnership and to meet future demands on the vital records system, it is necessary to upgrade and integrate current data collection technologies into an automated system that raises the functional capacity of all vital records offices in Wisconsin.

C. DHFS FY 02-03 Biennial Budget and Requirements of 2001 Wisconsin Act 16

To effectively address the issues summarized above, the Department of Health and Family Services requested increases in vital records fees and spending authority in the 2001-2003 biennial state budget to allow the vital records program to plan and implement a comprehensive, online electronic system. The budget bill (2001 Wisconsin Act 16) signed by Governor McCallum in August 2001 included a partial fee increase to implement additional record preservation activities but mandated that a study be conducted before planning for an online system could progress.

The Secretary of the Department of Health and Family Services was directed to appoint a committee by January 1, 2002, which was charged with recommending guidelines for an online, electronic vital records system. The Committee was to include the State Registrar, three Local Registrars, three Department representatives, and a genealogist. The Secretary decided that additional stakeholders were needed to address the needs of vital records filing parties and data users, and added seven business partners to the Committee: a medical examiner, a county clerk, a clerk of court, a funeral director, a physician, and representatives from a birthing hospital and the Wisconsin Association for Perinatal Care.

Under Act 16, the Committee's recommendations for an online vital records system must incorporate features that assure privacy, flexibility, and productivity. Additionally, the Committee was required to study methods employed by other states to prevent identity fraud and to make recommendations for increases in vital records fees if necessary. An outline of the Committee's proposals was completed by July 1, 2002. This document is the final report due to the Legislature and Governor by January 1, 2003.

Chapter II: Overview of the Wisconsin Vital Records Program

A. Description of Vital Records Functions in State Statute

1. Definition of a vital record

(69.01(26)) A vital record is defined by Wisconsin law as a certificate of birth, death, marriage, or divorce or annulment, and related forms, worksheets, and data.

2. Responsibilities of the Department of Health and Family Services and the State and Local Registrars

(69.02) The Department of Health and Family Services is required to appoint a State Registrar, establish a State Vital Records Office, and promulgate administrative rules necessary to administer the vital records program in Wisconsin.

(69.03, 69.20(4)) The State Registrar appointed by the Department is responsible for administering and enforcing Chapter 69, Wisconsin Statutes, supervising the State Vital Records Office, directing the vital records functions of the 74 Local Registrars in Wisconsin; and acting as the custodian of all records in the State Vital Records Office. The State Registrar must also promulgate rules and procedures to protect vital records, ensure the privacy of registrants and their families, and prevent the fraudulent use of vital records.

In addition to supervising and directing the statewide activities of the vital records program, the State Registrar is required to prescribe and furnish vital records forms and designate the means for data transmission; register, sign, and index original vital records; provide copies of records and data in response to requests; create, publish, and disseminate annual statistical reports; conduct training programs to ensure statewide uniformity in policy and procedure; provide access to vital records information to other agencies and the public; and review and report violations of Chapter 69.

(69.04) There are 74 Local Vital Records Offices in Wisconsin, consisting of 72 county registers of deeds and two city health offices. Local Registrars file vital records in the registration district where the event occurred.

(69.05, 69.06, 69.07) Local Registrars accept for filing, sign, assign a date of acceptance, copy, and index birth, marriage and death certificates presented in their offices; provide copies of records and data in response to requests; provide access to vital records information to other agencies and the public; and preserve, amend, and certify vital records.

The information contained on vital records is collected from many different sources, referred to as filing parties. Examples of filing parties include birth attendants and birthing hospitals, funeral directors, physicians, coroners and medical examiners, county clerks, clerks of court, tribal courts, marriage

Overview of the Wisconsin Vital Records Program

officiants, registrants (subjects of vital records), and the families of registrants. The State and Local Registrars direct and train filing parties to ensure the timely, accurate, and proper filing of vital records and the integrity of vital records data.

B. Uses of Vital Records

Vital records are used primarily for two purposes: as legal proof of the facts of the event and as a source of information.

Certified copies of vital records are required as legal proof and are used to:

- Obtain identification, such as a driver's license, passport, or identification card (proof of legal name, date of birth, and place of birth),
- Obtain employment (proof of legal name and place of birth),
- Enroll in school or sports programs (proof of age),
- Obtain benefits, such as life insurance or health insurance, military benefits, or government assistance programs (proof of parentage, marriage, or death),
- Change a surname following a marriage or divorce (proof of marital status),
- Enroll as a member of a Native American tribe (proof of ancestry),
- Settle an estate or transfer property (proof of death), and
- Enforce child support and other legal actions.

The information collected on vital records is used for a variety of purposes, including:

- Administration and evaluation of public health programs,
- Health research conducted by government agencies and universities,
- Population estimates,
- Family genetic research,
- Genealogical research, and
- Law enforcement and government assistance investigations.

In the last five years, the demand for copies of vital records has risen rapidly. This increase in demand is due to more stringent identification requirements enacted to combat the increase in identity theft and fraud and to growing public interest in genealogy and genetic research. Between 1998 and 2000, the number of requests for certified copies of vital records rose 14 percent and the number of requests for uncertified copies rose 54 percent.

C. Current Process for Filing and Amending Vital Records

Most of the current processes for filing vital records date back to 1907 and were designed to promote record availability and prevent the loss of records in case of a disaster. However, the functional redundancy required in the past to achieve these goals is not efficient, causes delays, and promotes discrepancies between records filed in different offices. The public demands convenient and timely access to vital records, which

requires efficient transmission of information between filing parties, Local Registrars and the State Registrar.

Over the years, the State Vital Records Office has developed several computer applications that have successfully reduced in-house workloads but which are not integrated or easily available to Local Registrars. Many Local Registrars have developed in-house applications for the same purpose. Many of the state and locally developed computer applications are difficult to modify, have limited communication with each other, and are not flexible enough to meet current needs of the State and Local Registrars and the filing parties. In most cases, these applications do not resolve problems associated with the storage and maintenance of multiple sets of paper documents filed separately from one another.

The vital records filing and amendment process relies heavily on the submission of records through the mail, a method that is expensive, time-consuming, and presents a security risk. If a record is lost or misdirected in the mail, it may not get filed during the required time period or information may be inappropriately released. Some of the information on the record is legally confidential; even the information that is not confidential can be used for illegal purposes, such as identity theft or fraud.

1. Vital events that occurred prior to October 1, 1907

On October 1, 1907, Wisconsin law required the creation of a state bureau of vital statistics to centralize the responsibility for collecting and preserving vital records. Before that time, vital records were filed by counties under the general supervision of the Secretary of State; however, there were no statutory requirements for filing, amending, or issuing copies of these documents. Currently, the State and Local Registrars preserve vital records dating from as early as 1814 through September 1907.

The State and Local Registrars preserve, issue copies, and provide information from pre-1907 vital records; however, most of the requirements restricting access to and amendment of vital records do not apply to these early records. Since most of these records are over 100 years old, concerns about the privacy of registrants and their families do not apply. Pre-1907 vital records are valued by historians and genealogists and do not present a substantial risk for identity theft or fraud.

2. Births

(69.11, 69.12, 69.13, 69.14, 69.15, 48.94, 767.51, 767.62, 786.36) The process for filing birth certificates changed after an Electronic Birth Certificate (EBC) system was implemented in 1994.

a. Filing birth records prior to 1989:

Before 1989, the birth attendant or staff from the birthing hospital collected the required information, completed a paper birth certificate form, and sent it to the Local Registrar to be filed. The Local Registrar reviewed, signed, numbered, copied, and indexed the original record, then

mailed the original certificate to the State Vital Records Office. If the county where the mother resided (residence county) was different from the county where the birth occurred (occurrence county), the Local Registrar of the occurrence county mailed a copy to the residence county, where it was reviewed, numbered, and indexed again. If the Local Registrar was a city health office, copies were mailed to both the occurrence county and the residence county. Once the original record was received by the State Vital Records Office, it was reviewed, numbered, and indexed yet again. In 1979, the State Vital Records Office began using a mainframe computer database to electronically store and index birth information, which made it easier and more efficient to review, index, and locate birth records and create statistical reports of birth data. The mainframe birth database is still being used by the State Vital Records Office and 11 Local Registrars.

b. *Filing births records 1989 through the present:*

In 1989, the State Vital Records Office contracted for the development of PC Log™, an Electronic Birth Certificate (EBC) system that allows birth record information to be electronically filed directly with the state office. Currently, 60 of Wisconsin's 105 birthing hospitals use the EBC system to file birth records, accounting for almost 90 percent of the 68,000 births that occur annually in Wisconsin. The informant in the hospital, usually the mother or father, and the medical staff complete a paper birth worksheet form, which is entered into the EBC system and sent to the State within five days of the birth. The EBC system has built-in data edits to ensure that the birth record information is essentially correct and complete before the record is filed. Once accepted by the EBC system, the record is electronically numbered (with both the State and local file numbers), indexed, and stored. Paper copies of the record are printed and mailed to the Local Registrar to be signed and filed. A paper "Notification of Birth Registration" form is printed and mailed to the parents to ensure that the legal information entered by the hospital is correct.

Although the EBC system has been a great improvement in the birth registration process, the system utilizes outdated technology. The system does not have the flexibility required to meet the needs of participating hospitals and cannot be accessed by Local Registrars, making it inherently inefficient and expensive.

For hospitals that do not have access to the EBC system and for births that do not occur in a hospital, the paper birth worksheet form is mailed to the State Vital Records Office. Information from the form is entered into the system by State staff before a paper copy of the record is printed and mailed to the Local Registrar and a paper "Notification of Birth Registration" form is printed and mailed to the parents.

Although edit checks in the EBC system prevent certain errors on birth records, other errors are identified after the record is filed; examples are

typographical errors in the child's or parents' names. In these cases, the filing party is notified of the error by mail and must reply in writing to correct the error. After State staff correct the record, copies are printed and mailed to the Local Registrar(s), where they are re-signed, reindexed, and refiled.

c. *Amending birth records:*

Changes and corrections can be made to the information on birth records either administratively or with a court order. If an error or omission is discovered on a birth record prior to filing, the State or Local Registrar contacts the filing party and requests a correction. After a record has been filed, only the State Registrar can make amendments.

If the original record has already been filed, the filing party can correct or change information on a vital record within 365 days of the event with written notice. After 365 days have elapsed since the event, corrections can be made by presenting acceptable proof of the correct information. Paternity (father's name) can be added to a birth certificate with written consent of both parents or following the marriage of the parents. The State Vital Records Office creates and provides forms, which are completed by the registrant or the registrant's family and sent to the state office. Other changes, such as adoptions, legal name changes, paternity removals and adjudications, and corrections of misrepresentations, are made by court order. After the court action is completed, the report of the court action is sent to the State Vital Records Office. Although legislation passed in 2001 allows for automated reporting of paternity adjudications, the majority of reports of court actions must be processed manually.

Any change or correction received by the State Vital Records Office is reviewed and, if not acceptable under statute, returned to the submitter. If the change or correction is acceptable, the original vital record is amended to reflect the new information. For births prior to 1989, this is a manual process that requires the original information to be crossed out and the new information written on the original record. The change is annotated in the margin of the record and copies are made and mailed to the Local Registrar(s). The State Vital Records Office must reindex and refile the original record. The copy is reindexed and refiled by the Local Registrar(s). For births from 1989 to the present, the record is amended electronically on the EBC system and corrected copies are printed and mailed to the Local Registrar(s). The copy is re-signed, reindexed, and refiled by the Local Registrar(s).

In certain cases, such as adoptions, the original record is impounded and a new record is created. Records for births prior to 1989 are manually impounded from the files and new records are created by completing a paper record. The State Vital Records Office numbers, indexes, and files the new paper record and removes the old record from the files and

indexes. For birth records from 1989 to the present, the State Vital Records Office can impound the original and create a new record electronically on the EBC system. Copies of the new record and a notice to destroy the old record are printed and mailed to the Local Registrar(s). The Local Registrar(s) sign, index, and file the new record, and remove the old record from files and indexes.

3. Deaths

a. *Filing death records:*

(69.18) The process for filing death records has been virtually unchanged since it began in 1907. The funeral director (or a person acting as such) is responsible for ensuring the paper death certificate form is completed correctly and submitting the original to the Local Registrar within ten days of the pronouncement of death. The information on a death record is collected from several different sources. The funeral director must obtain the necessary personal information from the next of kin or the best-qualified source available. The death certificate form is either mailed or hand-delivered by the funeral director to the medical certifier (either a physician or the county coroner or medical examiner) for cause of death and other medical information to be completed. The medical certifier returns the form to the funeral director for review. The funeral director then delivers it to the Local Registrar, where it is reviewed, signed, numbered, copied, and indexed. The Local Registrar files a copy, and mails the original to the State Vital Records Office. If the county where the registrant resided (residence county) is different from the county where the death occurred (occurrence county), the Local Registrar where the death occurred will mail a copy to the residence county, where it is reviewed, numbered, and indexed again. If the Local Registrar is a city health office, copies are mailed to both the occurrence county and the residence county. When the State Vital Records Office receives the original record, it is reviewed, numbered, and indexed for the third or fourth time. In 1979, the State Vital Records Office created a mainframe computer database, which is still in use, to electronically collect and index death information.

b. *Amending death records:*

(69.11, 69.12) If an error or omission is discovered on a death record prior to filing, the local or State Registrar contacts the filing party and requests a correction. If the original record has already been filed, corrected copies are sent to the Local Registrar(s) where they are reindexed and refiled.

With written notice, the filing party can correct or change information on a vital record within 365 days of the event. After 365 days have elapsed since the event, corrections can be made only by court order. After the court action is completed, the clerk of court provides the petitioner with a

report of the court action that he or she is to file with the State Vital Records Office.

If an original record is not acceptable due to the use of correction fluid or multiple cross-outs, the State or Local Registrar notifies the funeral director that a new record must be created and filed. This often results in a lengthy delay in filing the death record.

Any change or correction received by the State Vital Records Office is reviewed and, if not acceptable under statute, returned to the submitter. If the change or correction is acceptable, the record is amended to reflect the new information. Death records are amended manually, which means the information to be changed is crossed out and the new information is written on the original record. The change is annotated in the margin of the record and copies are made and mailed to the Local Registrar(s). The State Vital Records Office must reindex and refile the original record, and the Local Registrar(s) must reindex and refile the copy.

4. Marriages

a. *Filing marriage records:*

(765.19) Before a couple can be married in Wisconsin, they must apply for and obtain a marriage license from a county clerk. The county clerk collects the necessary information from the couple and types it onto the form. The couple gives the partially completed marriage license form to the marriage officiant. After the marriage occurs, the marriage officiant and witnesses complete the rest of the information on the form. At that point, the marriage license becomes the marriage certificate form. The officiant is required to submit the original marriage certificate form to the Local Registrar in the county where the marriage took place within three days of the marriage. The Local Registrar reviews, signs, numbers, copies, and indexes the record and files a copy. The original record is mailed to the State Vital Records Office, where it is reviewed, numbered, and indexed again. In 1979, the State Vital Records Office started using a mainframe computer database to electronically collect and index marriage information, which made it easier and more efficient to review, index, and locate marriage records and create statistical reports of marriage data. This database is still in use today.

b. *Amending marriage records:*

(69.11, 69.12) If an error or omission is discovered on a marriage record prior to filing, the local or State Registrar contacts the filing party and requests a correction. If the original record has already been filed, the State Vital Records Office sends a corrected copy to the Local Registrar where it is reindexed and refiled.

With written notice, the filing party can correct or change information on a vital record within 365 days of the event. After 365 days have elapsed since the event, corrections can be made only by court order. After the court action is completed, the clerk of court provides the petitioner with a report of the court action that he or she is to file with the State Vital Records Office.

If an original record is not acceptable due to the use of correction fluid or multiple cross-outs, the State or Local Registrar notifies the county clerk or officiant that a new record must be completed and filed. This often results in a lengthy delay in filing the marriage record.

Any change or correction received by the State Vital Records Office is reviewed and, if not acceptable under statute, returned to the submitter. If the change or correction is acceptable, the record is amended to reflect the new information. Marriage records are amended manually, which means the information to be changed is crossed out and the new information is written on the original record. The change is annotated in the margin of the record and copies are made and mailed to the Local Registrar(s). The State Vital Records Office must reindex and refile the original record, and the Local Registrar(s) must reindex and refile the copy.

5. Divorces

a. *Filing divorce records:*

(69.17) On a biweekly schedule, Wisconsin clerks of court are required to send completed paper divorce certificate forms to the State Vital Records Office for divorces and annulments finalized in their counties. Often, a clerk of court will require that the parties to the divorce or one of the parties' attorneys complete the form, which is then reviewed, signed and dated by the clerk of court and forwarded to the State Vital Records Office. Once received, reviewed, numbered, and indexed by the State Vital Records Office, the divorce record is entered into a Local Area Network (LAN) database.

b. *Amending divorce records:*

(69.11, 69.12) If an error or omission is made on a divorce record prior to filing, the local or State Registrar contacts the filing party and requests a correction. The filing party can correct or change information on a vital record within 365 days of the event with written notice. After 365 days have elapsed since the event, corrections can be made by court order. After the court action is completed, the clerk of court provides the petitioner with a report of the court action that he or she is to file with the State Vital Records Office.

If an original record is not acceptable due to the use of correction fluid or multiple cross-outs, the State or Local Registrar notifies the clerk of courts

that a new record must be completed and filed. This often results in a lengthy delay in filing the divorce record.

Any change or correction received by the State Vital Records Office is reviewed and, if not acceptable under statute, returned to the submitter. If the change or correction is acceptable, the record is amended to reflect the new information. Divorce records are amended manually, which means the information to be changed is crossed out and the new information is written on the original record. The change is annotated in the margin of the record and the State Vital Records Office must reindex and refile the original record.

D. Current Process and Fees for Issuing Vital Records Copies and Information

1. Process

(69.20, 69.21) Copies of and information from vital records are requested by the public, private companies, and government agencies and are often needed quickly for court actions, for genetic research, to travel, to obtain identification or employment, to provide benefits, or to identify outbreaks of disease. There are three ways to access vital records information: obtaining copies of records, obtaining statistical reports based on vital records data, and accessing indexes and records in person.

To obtain a copy of a vital record, Wisconsin law requires the requestor to apply in writing and submit a fee, which can be done in person, through the mail, or by fax. The requestor must provide enough information to locate the appropriate record, and requestors who apply in person must present proof of identity. Certified copies of vital records are used primarily as legal proof of the facts of the event. Uncertified copies are requested for the information provided on the record and are used primarily for genealogical and other types of research.

To obtain a certified copy, the requestor must have a direct and tangible interest in the record. By Wisconsin law, those with direct and tangible interest are defined as the registrant, a member of the registrant's immediate family, a legal guardian of the registrant, a person who can demonstrate that the record is required to protect a personal or property right, or a person authorized in writing by someone with a direct and tangible interest. An uncertified copy can be issued to anyone who requests it. Uncertified copies are clearly marked as unusable for identity verification purposes.

Once the State or Local Registrar receives the written request, it is reviewed for acceptability and completeness. If the request is acceptable, vital records staff locate the record in the files and create the copy. Electronic records (births from 1994 to the present) and birth records on the mainframe database (from 1978 to the present) can be located in an electronic index and printed from the system by the State Vital Records Office or one of the 11 Local Registrars with access to the mainframe. All other records must be located and copied manually, which can be

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time-consuming and difficult depending on the age, format, and condition of the indexes and records. If the information on the record does not match the information provided by the requestor, the vital records staff contacts the State or Local Registrar that has filed the same record to request verification of the information. If the information differs between offices, a determination of the correct information is made and replacement copies of the correct record are made and mailed to the other offices for filing.

If a record has been amended and is preserved in a format that cannot be changed (for example, laminated or put on microfilm), the records staff must create a multi-page copy with the original information on the first page and the amendment information on additional pages.

Information from vital records is released in standard and custom reports created by records staff or through direct access to the vital records and indexes. The State Vital Records Office prepares annual statistical publications based on vital records data that are used to track and compare rates and characteristics of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces over time. Federal, state, and local public health agencies use vital statistics to develop and evaluate preventive programs and to establish priorities in expenditures for health care and health promotion.

Custom reports of vital records data are used by public health agencies to identify health risks associated with certain occupations or geographic locations, by Wisconsin school districts to plan for future enrollment, by child support agencies to promote the legal establishment of paternity, and by state and federal agencies such as the Social Security Administration to initiate or stop benefit payments.

Most vital records and indexes can be viewed in person at the state and local vital records offices without a fee, although some offices require advance appointments due to space limitations. Members of the public and government agency staff regularly view indexes and records for law enforcement investigations, to verify the legitimacy of documentation and copies, and to conduct genealogical and genetic research.

2. Fees

(69.22) The statutory fees charged for copies of and changes to vital records are mandated in Wisconsin law as follows:

\$12.00	Search and one copy of a birth record (certified or uncertified) (\$5.00 is retained by the vital records office, \$7.00 is sent to the Children's Trust Fund.)
\$7.00	Search and one copy of a death, marriage, or divorce record or other vital record (certified or uncertified).
\$3.00	Additional copy of any vital record, requested at the same time as the first (certified or uncertified).
\$25.00	Filing fee for a delayed birth registration; this includes one copy of the record.

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\$20.00	Filing fee for a delayed marriage or death registration, or any change to a record which requires the creation of a new record (adoption, correction of misrepresentation, correction to cause of death, etc.).
\$10.00	Filing fee for any other change to a vital record after 365 days has elapsed.
\$10.00	Optional fee for expedited service.

E. Current Vital Records Preservation Initiatives

The archives of Wisconsin's State and Local Registrars include records dating back over 150 years. Old records are still accessed regularly by staff to fulfill requests for certified and non-certified copies and by genealogists to research family histories. As the paper records and indexes have deteriorated over time, State and Local Vital Records Offices have independently initiated projects to preserve and automate their records and indexes. While these efforts are necessary, they could not be coordinated to maximize efficiency of effort or dollars spent. Certain types and years of records have been reviewed, corrected and re-archived in a variety of different formats (including paper, microfilm, microfiche, laminated paper, electronic scanning, and electronic databases), while other records have not been adequately preserved.

The State vital records archives contain more than 5.7 million paper birth records and indexes, over 170,000 paternity establishment and adoption-related documents, and 3.3 million paper death, marriage and divorce records and indexes. Older records that were amended by hand, before the advent of computerized systems, have not been properly reviewed for accuracy and re-indexed. This makes locating records difficult and may result in erroneous information or even the release of legally impounded records.

Over the last ten years, the State Vital Records Office has initiated and completed several projects to correct, preserve, and automate the statewide vital records archives. During this time, some Local Vital Records Offices have invested time and money microfilming or electronically scanning these records. Unfortunately, these state and local preservation projects have not been coordinated to maximize their impact on the entire vital records system. A more automated and integrated approach to record preservation would save time and money and would better ensure the safety and accuracy of all vital records filed in Wisconsin. Successful future integration of these projects can best be accomplished through the records preservation feasibility study as recommended in Chapter 3, Section D.

Although significant progress has been made in preserving paper records, the issuance of certified copies of vital records is still, for the most part, a manual process. Because of the limited number and abbreviated format of records contained in the current mainframe birth certificate issuance file, only 11 Local Registrars have acquired access to the system. No automated issuance system exists for marriage, death and divorce records. Statewide comprehensive vital records indexes and record databases, available electronically both to the state and all Local Vital Records Offices, would be a tremendous asset to these offices in their efforts to provide the most efficient and cost-effective services to vital records customers throughout Wisconsin.

Chapter III: Recommended Guidelines for an Online Vital Records System

2001 Wisconsin Act 16 required the Committee to recommend guidelines for an online vital records system that incorporates features to ensure privacy, flexibility, and productivity. The Committee included guidelines for ensuring security with their recommendations for ensuring privacy. For some of the guidelines, the Committee listed specific features to include in the system. They considered both features that are necessary and features that are less critical but would be beneficial.

In addition to their recommendations for ensuring privacy and security, flexibility, and productivity, the Committee felt that the system plan should also include recommendations for preserving vital records, an essential part of any vital records system.

To ensure its recommendations for the system would meet the needs of vital records business partners and could be implemented in an efficient and cost-effective manner, the Committee collected information from a variety of sources. The Committee surveyed hundreds of vital records data submitters and Local Registrars in Wisconsin, including hospital staff, funeral directors, and city and county government officials, to assess their needs for the new system (Appendix B). The Committee also met with and viewed presentations from four vendors that specialize in creating electronic systems for vital records programs.

In addition, the Committee surveyed seven other states chosen for their proximity and similarity to Wisconsin. States were asked about their current vital records procedures and systems, plans for future automation, recommendations for other states, and methods used to prevent vital records fraud (Appendix C).

The Committee evaluated the findings of these surveys and meetings and, after several months of discussion, approved a list of guidelines. The guidelines address the need for privacy and security, flexibility, and productivity, and are detailed in the document, “Guidelines for an Online Vital Records System” (Appendix D). Both necessary and desirable features are detailed in the document, “System Features” (Appendix E).

After identifying guidelines for the system, the Committee reviewed and endorsed a list of information technology requirements developed by federal and state agencies and the Department of Health and Family Services, which are summarized at the end of this chapter.

A. Privacy and Security

To ensure the security of vital records and protect the privacy of registrants and their families, the system must prevent unauthorized access to confidential, sensitive and personally identifying information in all of its functions: data entry and amendment, data transmission and storage, record access, copy creation and issuance, and record storage. To accomplish this, the Committee made the following three recommendations, which include methods used by other states to prevent identity theft.

- 1. Recommended Guideline:** The system should incorporate technology and processes that prevent inappropriate and unauthorized access to vital records

information and copies during electronic and manual access. It should allow users to be verified and their activities to be monitored to assure only appropriate use of the system. It must meet current industry requirements for security that are consistent throughout all means of access, including provisions for data security, central control of printing functions, and physical security.

a. *Necessary Features:*

- **User Verification:** Verification of system users is one important way to prevent unauthorized access to the vital records system. The Committee feels that adequate verification of users can be achieved by assigning unique identifiers and passwords to users and allowing system administrators to specify acceptable password length and characteristics.
- **Activity Recording:** In addition to tracking the activities of users (such as logging which records a user enters), the system must also track other activities, including changes to and printing of records, customer requests, and security paper inventory and use. When a record is changed, the system must retain both the old and the new information.
- **Data Security:** The system must include secure-access control of printers within each office that are designated to print certain documents, such as certificate copies, to ensure that information and documents are not inappropriately released. The system must meet current government and industry security standards and incorporate firewalls and a minimum of 128-bit data encryption.

b. *Desirable Features:*

- **User Verification:** Prior to implementation, the use of biometric verification or electronic signature pads should be researched to see if either would be a cost-effective and reliable addition. It would be desirable, although not necessary, if the system administrator were able to specify automatic lock-out and intruder lock-out parameters.
- **Activity Recording:** It would be beneficial to be able to track customer complaints and resolutions.
- **Data Security:** It is preferable to encrypt data in the database, although this feature may not be cost-effective or practical to implement.
- It is preferable that the system automatically identify and report suspicious transactions.

2. **Recommended Guideline:** The system should identify corresponding data across databases, such as linking birth and death records. By automatically cross-matching death records to birth records, the system will prevent the identities of deceased persons from being used fraudulently. It will also decrease the amount of manual work currently required to cross-match birth and death records for statistical research.
 - a. *Necessary Feature:* The system must be able to automatically cross-match birth and death records in the database and allow partial and false matches to be identified and corrected.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* It would be beneficial to have automatic cross-matching of other types of records in the system, such as marriage and divorce records.
3. **Recommended Guideline:** The system should have the capability to set different levels of access for users. The system must allow each user to access the information required to perform his or her specific vital records functions, while preventing access to records and information to which that user is not entitled.
 - a. *Necessary Feature:* In order to prevent inappropriate access, the system administrator must be able to limit the access of users at both a screen and field level and should have control of user roles and locations.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* It would be helpful if security is controlled within the application software, not by a third-party product, and if varying levels of authority could be assigned to system administrators.

B. Flexibility

The Committee identified the following seven recommendations to ensure that the system meets both current and future needs of the State and Local Registrars, vital records business partners, the public and other users of vital records.

1. **Recommended Guideline:** The system should allow for implementation in modules. During implementation, the vital records program must continue to function before and during the completion of each phase.
2. **Recommended Guideline:** Users should be able to access the system with various levels of technology. Since users of the system will have differing access to technology, the system must allow records to be filed and accessed both manually and electronically.
 - a. *Necessary Feature:* Users must be able to access the system using varying levels of technology; the system must allow other agencies and the public access to vital records as permitted by statute and policy.

- b. *Desirable Feature:* It would be helpful, but not necessary, for the system to incorporate existing modules for public and agency access.
- 3. **Recommended Guideline:** Many vital records offices, business partners, and government agencies have existing electronic systems that perform functions that may not be included in the new system. As appropriate and cost-effective, the system should integrate with existing data systems to facilitate the Department's mission to monitor and analyze health, social, and demographic data and to allow for easier implementation and greater functionality.
 - a. *Necessary Feature:* In order to integrate with existing systems, the vital records system must be able to import and export data in multiple formats to allow for batch data submission and export of data directly into other systems. The system must be compatible with U.S. birth and death certificate standards and must be able to provide data to other agencies in the formats specified in existing contracts.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* It would be helpful if the system can integrate with existing federal programs such as SuperMicar and Geo Codes.
- 4. **Recommended Guideline:** The system structure must be able to incorporate future advances in software and hardware in a cost-effective manner.
- 5. **Recommended Guideline:** System modifications necessitated by changes in statute and policy must be made quickly and cost-effectively by allowing fields, edits, defaults, and instructions to be modified without changing the base application code.
- 6. **Recommended Guideline:** Multiple filing parties may be required to submit data for a single record. The system must allow multiple users to submit data separately before it is integrated into one record and must identify duplicate registrations.
- 7. **Recommended Guideline:** To correct errors and ensure data integrity, the system should allow authorized users to manually enter data or override electronic submission.

C. Productivity

The system must maximize efficiency by eliminating duplicate work and delays, by making communication easier, by ensuring data integrity, and by automating repetitive and manual tasks with the appropriate use of technology. The Committee identified the following nine recommendations to meet this goal.

- 1. **Recommended Guideline:** The system must allow Local Registrars to continue as the point-of-filing for original vital records in order to meet workload demands and provide timely service to customers.

2. **Recommended Guideline:** The current paper-intensive filing and amendment process requires information to be typed many times into separate systems. Electronic data submission should prevent duplicate data entry, keying errors, and discrepancies and should eliminate the time required to send certificates, queries, and changes through the mail.
 - a. *Necessary Feature:* The system must allow all types of vital records, customer requests, and changes to be entered and issued electronically with verifiable data integrity. The system must also automatically assign multiple file numbers and dates to records.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* It would be helpful if users could customize interface screens.
3. **Recommended Guideline:** Correcting errors prior to filing a record can be difficult and time-consuming. The system should incorporate modifiable, online data edits and default field values to prevent common errors, thereby reducing the number of unacceptable records and the additional delays and work required to correct errors.
 - a. *Necessary Features:*
 - Customizable Record Identification/Marking: The system must facilitate data entry and record identification by incorporating customizable online data edits and default field values. Authorized users must be able to mark records to identify record status and limit accessibility.
 - Amendment Annotation: The system must incorporate an amendment log format for recording changes to a record, to improve the clarity of the information provided and reduce embarrassment for the registrant and family named on the record.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:*
 - It would be preferable if the system allows but does not require mouseless-only functioning.
4. **Recommended Guideline:** The system should facilitate communication with users to automate the query process and provide online training. Incorporating online communication will decrease the time required to correct a record and prevent errors by allowing data submitters to ask questions prior to submission. Online training will help ensure that all users have had adequate instruction in system use and will decrease the amount of in-person training required during implementation.

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- a. *Necessary Feature:* The system must allow for communication with users by incorporating customizable help screens and instructions.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* It would be helpful if the system could facilitate automated queries and corrections of errors, incorporate online training modules, and allow messages to be posted by the administrator.
5. **Recommended Guideline:** The system should allow for the creation and dissemination of standard and custom reports to track the status of incomplete records, increase timeliness, and improve data quality. Adequate reporting functions will allow users to ensure that records have been filed completely and correctly, thereby decreasing delays and need for follow-up.
- a. *Necessary Feature:* The system must allow standard and custom reports to be created using multiple variables, and allow full and partial records and notations to be printed as required by law.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* Other valuable, but not mandatory, features include the ability to schedule regular report execution, automatic creation of standard letters and notifications, and built-in report builders or wizards.
6. **Recommended Guideline:** The system should allow data to be submitted during non-business hours and, preferably, when the main system is unavailable.
- a. *Necessary Feature:* The system should be available for data submission and retrieval during non-business hours (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* It would be beneficial if data could be submitted when the Internet is unavailable, through batch loading when access is restored.
7. **Recommended Guideline:** Current manual and electronic systems have a limited ability to locate a specific record without exact information. The system should automate the search functions and allow records to be located with limited information, which will improve the services provided to customers and law enforcement.
- a. *Necessary Feature:* The system must allow records and customer requests to be located using partial information and multiple fields.
 - b. *Desirable Feature:* It is preferable that the system incorporates Soundex searches.
8. **Recommended Guidelines:** To ensure the system is available to users, appropriate system maintenance must be provided and disaster recovery programs must be implemented.

- a. *Necessary Features:* To insure the productivity of day-to-day record submission and data usage, system maintenance, training and technical support must be provided. For day-to-day operations, the system must incorporate appropriate short-term disaster recovery technology and data retrieval processes to assure continued functionality if a system failure should occur.
 - b. *Desirable Features:* For major disaster scenarios, the system must allow critical vital records functions to continue off-site if the main system location becomes unavailable, allow data to be recovered to a specific point-in-time, and identify data that needs to be re-entered.
9. **Recommended Guideline:** Based on the experiences of other states and other Wisconsin agencies, the Committee felt that contractual provisions should be made if the system is purchased from an outside vendor.
 - a. *Necessary Features:*
 - The vendor must sign a service level agreement with monetary penalties for non-performance. The vendor must also provide system training (“train the trainers”).
 - The vendor must agree to either giving the State immediate or delayed ownership of the system source code or placing ownership of the system source code in a third-party escrow, to be provided free of charge to the State if the vendor goes out of business.
 - b. *Desirable Features:*
 - It is preferred that the vendor organize a users group to share best practices and upgrade costs, and provide recorded training (such as videos or Internet programs).
10. **Recommended Guideline:** The system should track revenue collected by users issuing certificates from the online system by type of payment and service provided.

D. Preservation

In addition to ensuring adequate privacy and security, flexibility, and productivity, an electronic vital records system must safeguard and preserve the records and data collected and maintained electronically, in compliance with ADM 12, Wis. Admin. Code (Electronic Records Management). While record preservation was not referenced in the Legislative directives for this report, it is an essential component of vital records issuance activities and disaster recovery plans. Efforts to correct, re-index and preserve older records must continue, regardless of decisions made on automating the registration

process. Nevertheless, preservation activities could be completed more efficiently in an automated system.

Inadequate preservation of vital records could lead to the loss of valuable legal, medical, and historical information used by governmental agencies and the public on a daily basis. The system to be developed should preserve existing paper records through the application of scanning and microfilming technologies, as well as provide for the creation, storage and future migration of records produced under the new system. The Committee identified three particular areas of concern.

- 1. Recommended Guideline:** The Committee recommends that any online registration system development be supplemented by a feasibility study to determine the most practical and cost-effective method to maintain, preserve and provide access to the remaining paper vital records. The results of the study should be used to make appropriate recommendations to the State and Local Vital Records Offices regarding record preservation, data conversion processes, and minimum acceptable data items available for automated vital records certification. The Committee recommends that representatives of Local Registrars, data submitters, vital records users and business partners participate in the feasibility study.

Currently, there are almost six million original birth records from 1907 to 1947 stored on paper at the State Vital Records Office. These records need to be edited for correctness, microfilmed and their information stored on computer in order to preserve their contents from damage or destruction. There are millions more vital records stored by the 74 Local Registrars that are still in the original paper format. If these records are not adequately preserved and protected, original documents may be lost due to deterioration or disaster.

The archives of the State and Local Registrars date back over 150 years. As the paper records have deteriorated over time, some vital records offices have independently initiated projects to preserve and protect the records. Although progress has been made, a significant amount of additional work must be done to ensure the protection of the statewide vital records archives.

- 2. Recommended Guideline:** The Committee recommends that the accuracy and functionality of vital records indexes be improved by converting existing paper indexes to an electronic format.

From 1907 until the 1980s, the vital records indexing process was entirely manual and paper-intensive. Each year, the State and Local Registrars would create a paper index, which must be continuously updated as changes are made to records. Consequently, these indexes have become incomplete and inaccurate over time. Because many of the indexes are not automated, it is labor-intensive and time-consuming to locate a specific record without exact information.

The paper indexes would be difficult to replace. If they were destroyed, records could not be located until new indexes were created. Since the information in the records is not stored electronically, new indexes would have to be keyed from the original vital records, which would be an expensive and prolonged project.

Currently, the State Vital Records Office uses the original paper indexes to locate birth, death, marriage and divorce records from 1907 through the 1950s. These indexes are in poor condition and are difficult to update and correct. Wisconsin Statute permits public access to many of these indexes. Since the indexes are not automated, however, the public must come to the office in Madison to view statewide indexes or to local offices to view records for that county's events. Many of the Local Registrars also need to automate their public indexes. In order to make locating vital records more efficient, the indexes must be reviewed and corrected before being entered into the online system.

3. **Recommended Guideline:** The Committee recommends that vital records be preserved through the appropriate application of new technology (conversion to new formats).

Unlike most other government records, vital records are retained permanently because of their value as legal and historical documents. Vital records dating back 100 to 150 years are regularly used by the public to research genealogy or for legal needs, such as proving ancestry or settling estates. Over time, technology improves and older data formats and media become obsolete. To prevent the loss of vital records, provisions must be made to convert existing electronic records to new formats and media as necessary in the future to preserve data integrity and ensure continued access.

To realize the full benefit of automating vital records functions, the long-term plan should provide for the systematic addition of critical data elements from paper records to the online database.

E. Federal, State, and Department Information Technology Requirements

In addition to the requirements identified by the Committee, there are federal, state, and contractual requirements for information technology that the system must meet.

1. **Federal Requirements:** The system must meet the standards set forth in federal law and existing contracts with federal agencies. The current requirements are not specified in this report because they may not be the same when a new vital records system is implemented. However, before implementation, it will be verified that the system is in compliance with the applicable federal requirements, including those below:

- Although the Vital Records Program is not required to meet the requirements of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), some vital records business partners, such as hospitals, are required to meet

HIPAA standards. For that reason, it is desirable that vital records data be stored in a manner which is HIPAA compliant.

- The system must also be in compliance with standards and procedures set forth in contracts with the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).
- The system must allow for the submission of vital records data to the Social Security Administration (SSA) in the format required by contracts.
- The system must use the best technology currently available to meet application and program needs while complying with all standards set by NCHS for vital records data collection and transmittal.

2. State Requirements: The vital records system must meet the technology standards and policies developed for state agencies by the Wisconsin Department of Electronic Government (DEG) and in contracts with other state agencies. A few of the existing requirements are summarized below. Before implementation, the most current requirements will be reviewed to ensure the system is compliant.

- According to DEG standards, the target database platform for an enterprise Local Area Network (LAN), such as a vital records system, is the Oracle family. A target platform is the standard product considered most appropriate. If compelling reasons exist, agencies may use the product, or another product from the standard family, on platforms other than the "target platform" (Wisconsin Enterprise Standards 521 – Database Software, <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/static/standards/std521r.htm>).
- An application developed by a state agency for deployment to local government entities should be browser-based. From October 1, 1999 forward, state applications deployed to local government must use nothing more than browser-based technologies at the workstation (Wisconsin Enterprise Standards 303 – Internet Services – World Wide Web – Application Development, <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/static/standards/std303r.htm>).
- Authentication and access control are to be independent of the application (Wisconsin Enterprise Standards 303 – Internet Services – World Wide Web – Application Development, <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/static/standards/std303r.htm>).
- Applications should follow the Access to Technology standards (Wisconsin Enterprise Standards 604 – Development of Accessible Applications, <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/static/standards/std604r.htm>) to make them accessible to persons with disabilities (Wisconsin Enterprise Standards 303 – Internet Services – World Wide Web – Application Development, <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/static/standards/std303r.htm>).
- Applications should be tested with a range of browsers from the lowest common denominator to the newest version, depending upon the given

audience (Wisconsin Enterprise Standards 303 – Internet Services – World Wide Web – Application Development, <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/static/standards/std303r.htm>).

- The system must allow for the electronic submission of and access to vital records data as required by contracts with other state agencies, such as the Department of Workforce Development and the Department of Transportation.
- The system must store electronically filed records in accordance with accessibility and platform conversion standards specified in ADM 12, Wis. Admin. Code, <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/static/erecords/Primer.htm>

3. Department of Health and Family Services Requirements: In addition to the statewide standards developed by DEG, the Department of Health and Family Services has created Department-wide standards for technology that the system must meet, in addition to the standards included in contracts with other Department agencies. Some of the current DHFS standards are summarized below; the detailed standards will be reviewed prior to implementation to ensure system compliance.

- When a database is used for a mission-essential enterprise-level application, such as an electronic vital records system, Oracle is the designated database system (DHFS Standard 3.6 Application and Database Development Tool).
- All Web applications will be deployed using WebSphere Application Server (DHFS Standard 3.6 Application and Database Development Tool).
- All Requests for Proposal (RFP), Requests for Bid, and acquisition of non-delegated information technology items must be approved by the DHFS Chief Information Officer.
- A nonstandard deployment may be implemented with the approval of the DHFS Chief Information Officer (DHFS Standard 3.6 Application and Database Development Tool).
- The system must allow for the electronic submission of and access to vital records data as required by contracts with other Department agencies, such as the Division of Public Health and the Immunization Registry.

Chapter IV: Costs and Savings of System Development, Implementation, and Maintenance

To develop cost estimates for the proposed system, the Committee and staff from the Department of Health and Family Services used cost estimates provided by states that have recently automated their vital records programs, quotes from software and hardware vendors, and recommendations from Department and other State information technology staff. Estimates for ongoing maintenance and preservation costs are separated from one-time development and implementation costs.

A. Implementation Schedule

The Committee anticipates that the system may take five to seven years to deploy fully, although most of the development and implementation costs will be incurred in the first three years, provided funding is available. Based on information from other states that have recently implemented similar systems, development will take about two years. During the development phase, the vital records program will write a Request for Proposal and acquire, customize, and install the necessary hardware and software.

The Committee believes that the first module, which involves replacing existing state data systems for birth registration and issuance (including electronic birth registration) and rolling out the system to birthing hospitals and Local Registrars, will become operative during the third year. Over the subsequent two to four years, modules for death, marriage, and divorce registration and issuance will be designed and deployed with additional business partners and data submitters.

Because of the modular approach to implementation, one-time costs will be incurred over the five- to seven-year implementation period. Ongoing savings and costs will be incurred gradually while the system is being implemented, but will not be fully realized until the system is completely deployed.

B. System Development and Implementation Costs

The cost estimate for system development and implementation includes funding for a full-time project manager during the five-year implementation period, conversion of existing systems and data, training for information technology staff, software purchases, and necessary modifications to the software. The cost estimate also includes funding to assist Local Registrars and government data submitters in accessing the system.

Item	One-Time Development Costs
Software purchase and customization	\$1,000,000
Project Manager (\$110,000 per year during five-year implementation)	\$ 550,000
Training	\$ 15,000
Total Development Costs	\$1,565,000

Costs and Savings of the Proposed System

Item	One-Time Implementation Costs
Conversion of existing system data	\$300,000
Training	\$ 60,000
Support to Local Registrars and data submitters	\$250,000
Total Implementation Costs	\$610,000

C. System Maintenance Costs and Savings

The cost estimate for system maintenance includes funding for application hosting, a full-time permanent database administrator, conversion of existing vital records data, ongoing training for Local Registrars and data submitters, and software maintenance and support.

After the system is fully implemented, the State Vital Records Office will realize significant savings in current expenditures for data storage, programming, telephone calls, postage, printing, and microfilming. The existing data systems and processes must continue until each module of the system is fully functional; consequently, it is not possible to specify the exact savings and when they will be realized during the implementation period.

Statewide business partners, Local Registrars, and data submitters will recognize considerable annual savings in staff time, postage, paper, printing, copying, travel and telephone charges and will be able to provide better, faster service to the public and other vital records users.

Item	Annual Ongoing Maintenance Costs
Application Hosting	\$200,000
Database Administrator	\$110,000
Software maintenance and support	\$100,000
Training	\$ 10,000
Total Maintenance Costs	\$420,000

D. Vital Records Preservation Costs

To appropriately correct and preserve the statewide vital records archives, the Committee recommends budgeting a portion of the additional revenue for annual projects to expand and improve the data available on the system. The Committee anticipates that vital records preservation projects will be initiated as soon as the system is implemented; consequently, these costs will begin in the second or third year of the implementation period.

Item	Annual Ongoing Preservation Costs
Vital records preservation and conversion	\$150,000
Total Preservation Costs	\$150,000

Costs and Savings of the Proposed System

E. Cost Estimate Summary

Item	One-time	Annual ongoing
Development and Implementation Cost	\$2,175,000	\$ 0
Maintenance Cost	\$0	\$420,000
Preservation Cost	\$0	\$150,000
Total System Cost	\$2,175,000	\$570,000

Chapter V: Recommended System Funding, Revenue Allocation, and Statute Changes

A. Funding Recommendations

Vital records operations are supported by program revenue, derived primarily from the sale of certificate copies, fees for filing changes to records, and contracts with the federal government. At the state level, the registration of birth and death certificates is partially subsidized by federal funds; however, no federal money is received for the registration of marriage or divorce certificates, which are currently unfunded functions of the State Vital Records Office.

The vital records fees in the following table will not change under the proposals in this chapter. As specified in Chapter V, Section E, a committee of business partners will review all vital records fees in future years for their appropriateness as the system is developed and implemented.

Current Fee	Service
\$12.00	Search and one copy of a birth record (certified or uncertified). (\$5.00 is retained by the vital records office, \$7.00 is sent to the Children's Trust Fund).
\$7.00	Search and one copy of a death, marriage or divorce record (certified or uncertified).
\$7.00	Search and one copy of an ancillary vital record (voluntary paternity acknowledgement, adoption report).
\$25.00	Filing fee for a delayed birth registration; this includes one copy of the record.
\$20.00	Filing fee for a delayed marriage or death registration or any change to a record which requires the creation of a new record (adoption, correction of misrepresentation).
\$10.00	Optional fee for expedited service.

The Committee proposes to pay for the cost of vital records automation and preservation through a combination of four fee changes: redirection of a small portion of two current fees charged for vital records functions and an increase of two fees for vital records services. These fee changes will allow the system to be paid for by those who will directly benefit from the improved services. By using a combination of fee changes to fund the system, the fee changes will be spread out over a variety of vital records users so that the impact will be minor on any given group. All funding recommendations assume baseline funding will not be decreased at the state or local level of vital records registration.

1. Effective October 1, 2001, the cost for an additional copy of a vital record was raised from \$2.00 to \$3.00, with the intent that the additional revenue be used for vital records automation and preservation initiatives. The additional revenue collected by the State Vital Records Office is being used to preserve at-risk vital records. The additional revenue collected by the Local Registrars goes into

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general funding for the local agency and may not be used to support vital records functions.

The Committee recommends that the \$1.00 increase in the additional copy fee be sent to the State Vital Records Office for four years to support the implementation of the new system. After the four-year term, the revenue will revert to the local agency where it is collected.

This fee change will not have any effect on the public, genealogists, or other vital records users since the fee will not be increased. It will have a limited effect on local agencies since they have been collecting the additional revenue for only one year and will retain the same amount of each fee they did prior to October 1, 2001. Redirection of the revenue will end after four years and the revenue will be used to fund improvements and efficiencies at the local level, which will result in long-term cost savings for the local agency.

Additional Copies Sold by Local Registrars	Current Fee	Annual Local Revenue	Proposed Redirection of Current Fee	Proposed Additional Annual Revenue
500,000 annually	\$3.00 each	\$1,500,000	\$1.00 each	\$500,000

2. For each marriage license sold in Wisconsin, the county clerk sends \$25.00 of the fee to the state treasury. The State Vital Records Office is responsible for providing forms, training, and support to county clerks to sell marriage licenses but does not receive any revenue from the sales to support the vital records program. Additionally, the state does not receive any federal money to support the registration of marriages; consequently, this is an unfunded function of the office.

The Committee recommends that \$5.00 of the \$25.00 state portion of the marriage license fee be sent to the State Vital Records Office to support the costs of the new system.

This fee change will not have any effect on the public or other vital records users since the fee will not be increased. The majority of the state portion of the fee will continue to go to state general revenue. The portion of the fee sent to the State Vital Records Office will be used to support the program for which the fee was collected, which will improve services to the paying customer.

Marriage Licenses Issued	Current State Portion	Annual State Revenue	Proposed Redirection of Current Fee	Proposed Additional Annual Revenue
36,000 annually	\$25.00	\$900,000	\$5.00 each	\$180,000

3. Currently, the fees to file changes on a vital record (e.g., a legal name change) range from \$10.00 to \$25.00, depending on the type of change. These fees are collected only by the State Vital Records Office since Local Registrars do not file

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these changes. Some of the fees for establishing paternity are partially or wholly subsidized by federal funds. Other fees for court-ordered changes to vital records are collected as part of court costs.

The Committee recommends setting the fee for making any change to a vital record at \$20.00.

This fee change will not only greatly simplify the vital records fee structure but will also bring in additional federal funding to the vital records program. The impact to the public will be minimal because, although some of the fees for changes to vital records will be increased, users will benefit directly from the additional system efficiency.

\$10.00 Fees Collected for Changes	Current Fee	Annual Revenue	Proposed Fee Increase	Proposed Additional Annual Revenue
22,000 annually	\$10.00	\$220,000	\$10.00 each (to \$20.00 each)	\$220,000

4. The State Vital Records Office is responsible for providing forms, training, and support for the county clerks of court to complete and submit divorce certificates. Although the clerk of court collects filing fees for each divorce, the State Vital Records Office does not receive any revenue from the filing fees to support the vital records program. Additionally, the state does not receive any federal money to support the registration of divorces; consequently, this is an unfunded function of the office.

The Committee recommends that a \$10.00 processing fee be added to the court costs for each divorce, which will be sent to the State Vital Records Office to support the costs of the new system.

The fee change will have a limited impact on the public since the increase is a small percentage of the total cost for a divorce. Additionally, the fee sent to the State Vital Records Office will be used to support the program for which the fee was collected, which will improve services to the paying customers.

Divorces	Current State Portion	Annual State Revenue	Proposed New Fee	Proposed Additional Annual Revenue
18,000 annually	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$10.00 each	\$180,000

B. Revenue Allocation

The Committee recommends that the additional revenue collected by the State Vital Records Office through the above fee changes be put in a continuing appropriation to be used solely for vital records automation and preservation. Since no additional revenue will be collected by Local Registrars, funding has been set aside in the implementation budget to provide them access to the system without cost. Funding will also be made available to assist other government data submitters to access the system.

Because the system will take five to seven years to implement, it is necessary that the State Vital Records Office have spending authority that will roll over year to year for the duration of the project.

C. Position Authority

As part of the budget request, the Committee recommends two additional full-time positions be provided to the State Vital Records Office: A five-year project position for a Project Manager will be needed during the design and implementation of the system, and a permanent Database Administrator will be needed to maintain the system.

D. Statute Changes

The Committee identified the following four statute changes needed to implement the fee changes recommended above.

1. Redirection of \$1.00 increase in additional copy fee: 69.22(1)(a), 69.22(1)(b), 69.22(1)(c)
2. Redirection of marriage license fee: 765.15
3. Increase in change to vital records fees: 69.22(5)
4. New fee for processing a divorce certificate: 814.61(1)(a) and/or 814.61(1)(b)

E. Continued Advisory Role of Business Partners

The Committee recommends that representatives of Local Registrars, data submitters, vital records users, and other business partners be given a continued advisory role throughout the design and implementation to ensure the system meets their needs. It is anticipated that this advisory group will participate in the drafting and evaluation of a Request for Proposal and will meet regularly to evaluate the development, implementation, and operation of the system. The Committee will also review the current vital records fee structure and disbursement and will recommend changes that will optimize the effectiveness of the automated system in future years.